diseases. The authors, a paediatrician and a mass spectrometrist, have set out to help those engaged in this demanding subject by teaching the clinicians about the methodology, the chemists about the diseases, and both about the biochemical and metabolic aspects of the organic acidaemias.

The book is in 3 parts: chapter 1 is on techniques, written with clinicians in mind; chapter 2 describes the organic acidaemias; and finally there are 4 appendices that concisely summarize the rationale and methodology of the procedures used, and present gas chromatographic and mass spectrometric data covering compounds likely to be encountered.

The practical orientation of the book means that it will be of value mainly to those already committed to the diagnosis and investigation of organic acidaemias. Clinicians unfamiliar with the analytical methods will find the first chapter hard going. The second one gives a brief but clear introduction to inborn errors of metabolism. The appendices contain a lot of useful data, but Appendix B, retention indices of over 200 organic acids, mostly on columns packed with OV-22; is of limited appeal.

We have used this book in our department and conclude that it will appeal most to clinical biochemists providing paediatric diagnostic services for inborn errors of metabolism. It is well produced, clearly set out and easy to read, and has an adequate index. There is, however, a limit to what can be crammed into such a short book, especially when a third of it is reference material, so the treatment is inevitably superficial. Someone who has read this book and would like more detail should consider graduating to 'Organic Acids in Man' by R.A. Chalmers and A.M. Lawson.

K. Blau

The Natural Coumarins

by R.D.H. Murray, J. Méndez and S.A. Brown

Wiley; Chichester, New York, 1982
xii + 702 pages. £72.00

This is truly an encyclopaedic treatment of the natural coumarins; it encompasses their occurrence, chemistry and biochemistry. Its 702 pages, 3383 references, 13 chapters, 5 appendices and 3 indexes provide an all embracing coverage of the subject which even the most ardent coumarinologist would find difficulty in faulting. An attraction to the biochemist is the detailed treatment of the biosynthesis of the coumarins with proper stress on the stereochemistry of the reactions involved and with a section on synthesis in diseased plants. Perhaps even more valuable are the reviews of areas which have not been treated so frequently in the general biochemical literature. Especially useful is the treatment of degradative metabolism and detoxication of coumarins and their biological activities, particularly those of the aflatoxins, the 4-hydroxy coumarins, including the anticoagulant dicoumarol, and antibiotics such as novobiocin. Appendix 5, which runs to 124 pages, covers the botanical distribution of coumarins and will be of considerable reference value to plant biochemists. The present day cost of specialist monographs continues to amaze but the most optimistic view of the price of the present book is that at 10 pence/page it is good value. The authors should be congratulated not only on their scholarship but on their ability to present so clearly such a mass of information.

T.W. Goodwin